

**He was the greatest writer in the English language and is known around the world. But how much do you really know about William Shakespeare and his life?**

William Shakespeare was a poet and a playwright and is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, in central England, in 1564 and he died in 1616. His surviving work consists of 38 plays, 154 sonnets and some other poems. He is best known for his plays, which have been translated into every major language and are performed more than those of any other playwright in the world.

When William Shakespeare was 18 years old he married Anne Hathaway, and they had three children. Shakespeare went to London to work as an actor and a writer. In 1599 the Globe Theatre was built in London and it was in this theatre, situated on the banks of the River Thames, that some of Shakespeare's plays were first performed. In 1613 the theatre was destroyed by a fire. However, a modern reconstruction of the theatre was built near the original site in 1997 so even today you can go to the Globe Theatre to see one of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare's work is still very popular today. But why do we like these old plays? Perhaps it is because they all contain fantastic stories. His characters suffer bloody battles, deaths by poison, huge family fights, problems between brothers and sisters, problems between parents and children ... The plays are also full of parties, weddings and funerals. They are quite simply action-packed.

Here is a selection of Shakespeare's plays. Maybe you've seen some of them.

### **The Merchant of Venice**

This play is about the idea that people usually get what they deserve in the end, good or bad. Antonio, a businessman, borrows money from Shylock, a money lender. If he doesn't pay back this money in time, Shylock will cut off a piece of his body. Antonio loses all his business and must pay this terrible price ... but is saved by love.

### **Hamlet**

This play is about revenge and also about how difficult it is to take action sometimes, even when it is important. Hamlet's father is murdered by another man, who then marries Hamlet's mother. Everybody wants to see Hamlet dead. Hamlet must take revenge, but will he be able to? The famous quotation 'To be or not to be, that is the question' comes from this play.

### **As You Like It**

This play is a comedy about romantic love. There is a battle between two evil brothers and two good brothers. People hide in a beautiful forest. They fall in love, women disguise themselves as men, and there are many jokes, songs and games.

### **Henry V**

This is a history play about a famous English king, and a famous battle, Agincourt. We watch the preparations for the battle, the fighting and the results. There are questions in this play: why do men fight? What are wars? Are they glorious or terrible?

Which play would you like to see?